

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 03346 301025Z

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ACTION H-03

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----- 031581

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4423

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OREP, PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: PROBLEMS IN ARRANGING CALLS ON PRESIDENT ASAD BY CODELS

1. HAFEZ AL-ASAD EASILY HOLDS THE NEAR EAST TRACK RECORD OF "HARDEST-TO-SEE CHIEF OF STATE." THESE DAYS APPARENTLY ANY US CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION CAN MEET WITH PRESIDENT SADAT AND ENJOY A PACKAGE DEAL IN AMMAN OF KING, CROWN PRINCE AND PRIME MINISTER. PRIMIN RABIN SEEMS RARELY, IF EVER, TOO BUSY TO RECEIVE US CONGRESSMEN. AS NEA AND H ALREADY AWARE, OUR GROWING LIST OF UNHAPPY CODEL'S NOW

INCLUDES CODEL OBEY, AUGUST 25/26 AND CODEL SIKES AUGUST 27/28.

2. FOLLOWING FACTORS PROBABLY CAUSED ASAD BE NO-SHOW FOR SIKES:

A. ASAD UNUSUALLY BUSY WITH OTHER MEETINGS AND FOREIGN VISITORS, MOST OF WHICH ARE RELATED TO CURRENT ME NEGOTIATIONS;

B. FATIGUE. MINECON IMADI TOLD AMBASSADOR AUGUST 26 THAT ASAD WAS LOOKING EXTREMELY TIRED;

C. DESPITE OUR CONTINUAL PUSHING, MFA/PROTOCOL DID
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 03346 301025Z

NOT PUSH VIGOROUSLY ENOUGH;

D. THERE POSSIBILITY THAT NOVELTY OF SEEING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS HAS WORN OFF. OF THE SEVERAL CODELS HERE IN PAST YEAR ONLY SENATORS PERCY, MCGOVERN AND SCOTT SUCCEEDED IN MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT.

3. OTHER BASICREASONS FOR ASAD'S NON-AVAILABILITY TO US CODELS ARE:

A. HIS GENERAL DISINTEREST IN PUBLIC RELATIONS;

B. HIS RELATIVE LACK OF SOPHISTICATION ABOUT VALUE OF CULTIVATING RELATIONS WITH US CONGRESSMEN; AND,

C. FACT HE IS BY ALL REPORTS FAR MORE HEAVILY INVOLVED IN DAY-TO-DAY DETAILS OF RUNNING SYRIA THAT ARE HIS AREA COUNTERPARTS IN ADMINISTERING THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

4. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE VIGOROUSLY IMPRESS ON ASAD AND HIS ADVISORS GAINS FOR SYRIA IN RECEIVING CODELS. WE WILL, HOWEVER, IN FUTURE STRIKE EVEN MORE PESSIMISTIC NOTE IN RESPONDING TO FUTURE CODEL REQUESTS FOR MEETING WITH ASAD SO AS HOPEFULLY TO REDUCE CODEL DISAPPOINTMENT IF NO MEETING EVENTUATES.

5. WE ALSO RECOMMEND THAT DEPARTMENT OFFICERS CONCERNED, WHEN LEARNING OF CODEL INTENTION TO VISIT DAMASCUS, SHOULD IMMEDIATELY INFORM CODEL OF HIGH ODDS AGAINST THEIR MEETING ASAD. ON POSITIVE SIDE CODELS SHOULD BE ADVISED THERE ARE HIGHLY QUALIFIED CABINET MINISTERS HERE READY FOR MEETINGS. ON POLITICAL QUESTIONS FONMIN KHADDAM WHEN IN TOWN AND MININFO AHMAD (BOTH ARABIC SPEAKING) ARE GENERALLY AVAILABLE TO MEET WITH OUR DELEGATIONS. IF CODEL, ON OTHER HAND, HAS SPECIFIC SUBSTANTIVE INTEREST IN ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, SYRIAN CABINET HAS SOME EXCELLENT ENGLISH SPEAKING SPOKESMEN IN MINECON KMADI, EUPHRATES DAM MIN KAHLE, PETROLEUM AND MINERALS MIN MUSTAFA, ETC.
MURPHY

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